Night on the Milky Way Train

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The original, ' "Night On The Milky Way Train" in English (Bilingual Edition)', was published from Chikuma Shobo.

A LESSON IN THE AFTERNOON

'So you see, boys and girls, that is why some have called it a river, while others see a giant trace left by a stream of milk. But does anyone know what really makes up this hazy-white region in the sky?'

The teacher pointed up and down the smoky white zone of the Milky Way that ran across a huge black starmap suspended from the top of the blackboard. He was asking everybody in the class.

Campanella raised his hand, and at that, four or five others also volunteered. Giovanni was about to raise his hand, but suddenly changed his mind.

Giovanni was almost sure that it was all just made up of stars. He had read that in a magazine. But lately Giovanni was sleepy in class nearly every day, had no time to read books and no books to read, and felt, for some reason, that he couldn't properly follow anything anymore.

The teacher noticed this instantly.

'Giovanni, you know what it is, don't you?'

Giovanni stood up courageously. But once on his feet, he wasn't able to give a clear answer.

Zanelli, sitting in the seat in front of him, turned around and giggled at him.

Giovanni was flustered, blushing from one ear to the other.

The teacher spoke once again.

'If you were to take a close look at the Milky Way through a big telescope, what would you find it made of?'

Giovanni was now absolutely sure that you'd find stars, but just like the moment before, he couldn't get his answer out.

The teacher, perplexed, finally turned his gaze to Campanella.

'Well, what about you, Campanella?'

Campanella, who had raised his hand so readily a moment ago, just stood in his place fidgeting, unable to answer the question.

The teacher, now more surprised than ever, stared for some time at

him, then said, pointing at the starmap...

'All right, then, fine. When you look at this hazy-white Milky Way through a good big telescope, the blur is resolved into a great number of tiny stars. Isn't that right, Giovanni?'

Giovanni, now red as a beet, nodded, and before he knew it his eyes were filled with tears and he thought...

That's right, I knew it all along, and so does Campanella, because it was all in a magazine that we once read together at Campanella's father's house, and he's a scholar!

Campanella leafed through that magazine and went straight into his father's library, brought a thick book from the shelf, opened it to MILKY WAY, and we spent forever together looking at the lovely photograph of white spec ks that covered the pitch-black page.

The reason why Campanella didn't answer the teacher right away, even though there was no reason at all for him to forget, is because he feels sorry for me because I have to work hard before and after school and then I feel too down-in-the-dumps to play with everybody or even to talk with him very much.

When Giovanni thought about how Campanella had deliberately not

answered out of sympathy for him, he felt indescribably sad both for himself and for Campanella.

The teacher began again.

'So, if we think of the Milky Way as the Celestial River, then each and every one of these tiny little stars may be seen to be a grain of sand or pebble on the bed of that river. If we imagine it to be a giant stream of milk, then it's even more like a river, and the stars become minute fatty globules floating inside the white liquid.'

'Now, ask yourself, what does this liquid actually do, and you will see that it transmits light at a given speed through the void of space, and our Sun and Earth are both floating inside it too. So, you see, we are all living in the liquid of the Celestial River, and when we gaze out from where we are, just as water appears bluest at its deepest spots, so will the places with the most stars look to us the whitest and haziest. That is where the sky's river bed is the densest and most far-reaching. Now look at this model.'

The teacher pointed to a large lens that was convex on both sides. Inside the lens were countless grains of sand, all gleaming.

'This very much resembles the shape of the Milky Way. You can think of all these glittering grains of sand as stars, all radiating their own light just as our Sun does. Our Sun lies some distance from the

centre to the edge and the Earth is very close by it. But imagine yourself inside this lens at night, looking out. Through this thinner part of the lens you will see only a few grains...stars, I mean...shining.'

'But if you look in this direction and in this one, where the glass is thickest, you will see any number of shining grains...stars, I mean...and the farther you look directly into it the more blurry milky-white everything w ill appear. That is how we see the Milky Way today. As for the actual size of the lens and the various stars inside it, class time is over now so we'll discuss it all again in our next science lesson.'

'And as tonight is the Milky Way Festival, I hope that you will all go outside later and take a good close look at the sky. That's all. Please put away your books and notebooks.'

For a while the whole classroom was filled with the sounds of books being stacked and desktops being creaked open and slammed down. In a moment all stood up as straight as arrows, bowed to the teacher and left.

THE PRINTING HOUSE

As Giovanni was walking out the school gate, seven or eight children from his class were gathered in the yard, forming a circle around Campanella by the cherry blossom tree in the corner. They were no doubt meeting to discuss how to get the big snake gourds that they needed to put lights into and how to make lanterns to float down the river for the star festival that night.

Giovanni hurried out the gate waving his arms high in the air. He passed by many houses where people were busily preparing for the Milky Way Festival, hanging decorative bulbs made of yew tree needles from their eaves and fixing lanterns to the branches of white cedar trees.

Without stopping off at home he turned three corners, entered a large printing house, greeted the man doing accounts by the door in a baggy white shirt, removed his shoes, stepped onto the wooden floor and opened the big door in front of him. Inside all the lights were on even though it was still afternoon, and rotary presses were clacking and clanging away and lots of people with cloth tied around their head or visors perched over their eyes were reading or counting in sing songs and hums.

Giovanni went directly to the man who was sitting at the tall, third desk from the door and bowed to him.

The man rummaged about on one of his shelves for a moment and handed Giovanni a sheet of paper, saying...

'This should be enough for you to pick today.'

Giovanni pulled out a small flat box from the foot of the man's desk, went to his place in a well-lit corner of the room and squatted down beside cases of type propped against the wall. He began to pick tiny type, no larger than grains of millet, with a pair of tweezers.

'Hey, Three-Eyes!' said a man in a blue apron passing behind him. Several men nearby sniggered coldly without saying a word or looking at him.

Giovanni painstakingly picked all his type, rubbing his eyes over and over again.

Some time after the clock chimed six, having thoroughly compared the flat box full of type with the sheet of paper in his hand, he returned to the man at the tall desk. The man took the box, giving him a slight silent nod. Giovanni bowed, opened the door and went back to the accountant dressed in white who, also without uttering a sound, handed him one little silver coin.

At this Giovanni's face suddenly lit up, he bowed to the man in the highest of spirits, took his satchel from the foot of the accountant's desk and darted for the door.

From there, whistling cheerfully, he stopped in at the bread shop, bought a small loaf of bread and a bagful of sugarlumps, then sprinted off as fast as his feet would take him.

HOME

The little house that Giovanni came home to in such high spirits was the left one in a row of three located off a back street. Purple cabbages and asparagus plants were growing in a wooden box beside the door and shades were rolled down over two little windows.

'I'm back, Mum!' said Giovanni, slipping out of his shoes. 'Are you feeling all right?'

'Oh Giovanni, you must have worked so hard today. It has been cool today and I have been feeling just fine.'

Giovanni stepped up from the entryway onto the floor. His mother was resting in the front room with a white cloth over her face.

'I bought some sugarlumps today, Mum,' he said, opening one of the windows. 'I wanted to put a few in your milk for you.'

'You have some first, dear. I don't feel like it just now.'

'Mum, what time did Sis go back?'

'Oh, around three, I think. She did all the things for me.'

'Your milk hasn't come, has it?'

'It should have by now,' she said.

'I'll go get it for you.'

'Don't hurry on my account. You go ahead and eat something first, Giovanni. Your sister cut some tomatoes and left them there.'

'I'll have them then.'

Giovanni took himself a plate of tomatoes that was sitting by the window.

'Mum, I'm sure dad will be coming home soon now,' he said, munching hungrily on the tomatoes and a piece of bread.

'Yes, I think so too. But why are you so sure?'

'Because it said in this morning's paper that the catch up in the north was really great.'

'But, you know, your father may not have gone fishing up there.'

'No, he's out there all right. Dad couldn't have done anything bad enough that they had to send him to prison or something for. It wasn't all that long ago that he came to our school and donated all those things like that huge crab shell and those reindeer horns. They're still keeping them in the specimen room. All the sixth graders get to see them when the teacher brings them one at a time to the classroom. Year before last, on a school excursion....'

'Your father promised to bring you back an otterskin coat the next time he came back, didn't he?'

'All the kids make fun of me about that every time they see me.'

'Do they say nasty things to you?'

'Yeah, except for Campanella. He never says nasty things. Whenever somebody does, he always looks really sorry for me.'

'Your father and Campanella's father were close friends just like you two when they were little.'

'Oh, that's why dad used to take me sometimes to Campanella's house. Everything was so good then. I used to go all the time on my way home from school. They had a train that ran on an alcohol

burner. When you hooked up seven rails it made a circle with telegraph poles and signals, and the train could only go when the signal light turned green. Once we ran out of alcohol so we put in some kerosene, but the little boiler got all sooty.'

'Did it now....'

'It's always so quiet there when I pass by every morning delivering the paper.'

'That's because it's still early.'

'They've got a dog named Sauer and he's got a tail just like a broom. He yelps and sniffs and when I'm there he follows me all the way to the end of the block. Sometimes he even follows me further. Tonight everybody's going to make lanterns out of snake gourds and float them down the river. I'll bet anything that dog will follow us.'

'That's right, tonight was the Milky Way Festival.'

'Uh huh. I'll go get your milk and have a look on the way back.'

'All right, you do that. But don't go on the river, Giovanni.'

'I'll just watch from the bank. I'll only be gone an hour.'

'You don't have to come back so soon. I'm not worried so long as you're with Campanella.'

'Oh, we'll be together all right. Should I close the window for you, Mum?'

'Well, let me see...it's already getting cool now, I suppose.'

Giovanni rose, closed the window, put away his plate and the remaining bread, whipped his shoes on and said...

'Then I'll be back in an hour and a half.'

He passed through the dark doorway.

NIGHT OF THE CENTAUR FESTIVAL

With his lips puckered as if he were whistling some sad song, Giovanni came walking toward town down a slope that was a pitch black tunnel of thickly growing white cedars.

A single tall street lamp, radiating a brilliant yet soft light, stood at the foot of the slope. As he steadily made his way toward the lamp his shadow, which had been trailing behind him like a lanky blurry murky ghost, be came darker and more distinct, kicking up its legs and swinging its arms until turning around to his side.

I'm a great locomotive! I'm speeding up here because this is an incline. I'm going to pass that lamppost any second now. Hey, now my shadow's the needle of a compass. It's gone around in a circle and it's right in front of me!

That is what Giovanni was thinking as he took giant steps beneath the street lamp. Just then Zanelli, who had sniggered at him in class that day, came out of a dark alleyway on the other side of the post. He was wearing a new shirt with pointed collars, and he all but bumped into Giovanni as their paths crossed.

Giovanni wanted to say, 'Zanelli, are you going to the river to float gourds?' But before he could get the words out, Zanelli yelled

nastily from behind, 'Giovanni' s getting an otter coat from his father!'

Giovanni's heart suddenly went cold and he heard a ringing in his ears coming from all around him.

'Who do you think you are, Zanelli!' he screamed back. But Zanelli had already disappeared into a house with a white cedar tree in front.

Why does he keep saying those things when I haven't done anything to him? He looks just like a rat when he runs away like that. He's so stupid, that's his problem!

Giovanni's mind was leaping from one thing to another as he passed through town with all the houses decorated in the most beautiful array of ornamented branches and lights.

The watchmaker's shop had a bright fluorescent light in the window and an owl, made of stone, whose red eyes rolled around every second. All kinds of jewels were piled on a platter made of thick glass the colour of the sea. The platter rotated, revolving the starlike jewels and bringing a copper centaur around from the other side. Between the centaur and the jewels there was a circular black map of the heavens decorated with green asparagus leaves.

Giovanni forgot himself in the map of the heavens.

It was much much smaller than the star chart that he had seen at school earlier that day. But with this one all you had to do was to set the date and time by turning the platter, and the sky for that night would appear in the oval opening. The Milky Way ran straight through the middle...a smoky zone of white stretching from one end to the other with what looked like vapours of steam rising, as if after an explosion, from the bottom reaches.

Further into the shop stood a small telescope on a glowing yellow tripod and behind that, on the back wall, hung a big map depicting the entire sky in constellations of bizarre beasts, snakes, fish and bottle shapes. Giovanni wondered if the sky was really so crammed with scorpions and brave warriors and things, and he thought, standing there in a daze...

Ah, I'd like nothing more than to travel inside there as far as a human could go!

Then suddenly he remembered the milk for his mother and he walked away from the watchmaker's shop.

He went through town swinging his arms and straining to swell up his chest on purpose, even though the shoulders of his coat were pinching him.

The air was crystal clear, flowing through the streets and past the shops as if it were water. Street lamps were tucked away among the dark green branches of fir and oak, and the six plane trees in front of the Electric Company, decked inside, outside and everywhere with miniature light bulbs, made the whole place look like the Court of the Mermaids under the sea.

All of the children, dressed in freshly pressed kimonos, were whistling the tune of the rotating stars or running about and shouting...

'O Centaurus, Let the Dew Fall!'

As they happily played, fireworks of blue magnesium burned in the sky. But Giovanni, his head drooping down, was far away from that lively atmosphere about him. He hurried in the direction of the dairy.

He found himself on the edge of town where countless poplar trees stood as if floating up into the starry sky. He opened the darkened gate of the dairy and stopped by the dusky kitchen which smelled of cows. He took off his cap, calling out...

'Good evening.'

But it looked quiet inside, without a soul in sight.

'Good evening,' he called loudly again, standing up very straight. 'Anybody home?'

After a while an old woman shuffled out. She did not look well at all, and mumbled to herself, 'What d'ya want?'

'Um, we didn't get any milk at my place today,' said Giovanni in a spirited voice, 'so I'm here to fetch it.'

The old woman scratched a patch of skin under her red eye and looked down at Giovanni.

'No one around here now, and I dunno. Come back tomorrow,' she said.

'But my mum's sick, so we must have it by tonight.'

'Well, in that case come back a little later.'

The old woman was almost gone when Giovanni called out, 'A little later? ...well, thank you,' bowed and left.

When Giovanni was about to turn the corner into town he noticed six or seven boys in front of the grocer's on the road to the bridge. Their black shapes mingled strangely with their dimly glowing white shirts. They were eac h carrying a lighted gourd lantern, whistling and laughing.

There was no mistaking those whistles and laughs. They belonged to Giovanni's classmates. At first Giovanni, startled, started to turn back, but then he changed his mind and headed for the bridge with very sure strides.

'Going to the river?'

That's what he wanted to say, but the words got stuck in his throat, and before he could say anything at all, Zanelli hollered...

'Giovanni's getting an otter coat!'

Immediately everyone joined in...

'Giovanni's getting an otter coat!'

Giovanni, blushing to his ears, started to walk. He was already past them when he noticed Campanella standing tall among them. Campanella was keeping silent, with a smile of soft compassion on

his lips, no doubt worried that Giovanni might take offense at the others' words.

Giovanni avoided Campanella's gaze, and as he left his friend behind he heard the others break out in their loud whistling again. He turned the corner, looking back at them and saw Zanelli looking back too. Campanella, now whistling with all his might, was disappearing into the milky-white haze surrounding the bridge.

Giovanni, overwhelmed by sadness, began to run out of the blue, as all the little children, who thought that Giovanni was just running for the fun of it, hopped about on one leg, screaming, yelling and hooting with their hands over their ears.

In an instant he found himself hurrying toward a black hill.

THE WEATHER STATION PILLAR

Beyond the pasture the hills rolled on one after another, while their flat blackened peaks seemed to be lined up lower than usual, dim and hazy below the Big Dipper in the northern sky.

Giovanni was already deep inside a grove of trees that were dripping with dew. He climbed steadily up a narrow path that was like a thread illuminated by starlight, the single clearing in a thicket of dark plants taking on all shapes and sizes. There were tiny insects gleaming blue amid the bushes, rendering their leaves a transparent green and reminding him of the lanterns that all the children had been carrying.

Giovanni came out of the pitch black pine and oak wood, and all of a sudden there was a vast sky above him, with the Milky Way, soft and blurry white, streaming from north to south.

He could make out the pillar of the weather station at the top of a slope that was a carpet of daisies and bellflowers. Their fragrance was so strong that he felt you could smell it through a dream. A single bird passed over him, crying above the hill.

Giovanni came to the base of the weather station pillar at the very top of the hill and, shuddering, plopped down into the cold grass.

The lights of the town below were burning through the darkness as if the town itself were a miniature shrine at the bottom of the sea. He could faintly hear snatches of children's screams and bits of whistles and songs. The wind howled far away and all the hill's plant life rustled. His sweat-soaked shirt started to give him a chill as he looked down on the distant sweeping-black field from the edge of town.

The sound of a train came to him from the field. It was a little train with a single row of tiny red windows, and inside it all of the passengers were peeling apples, laughing or doing one thing and another. This made Giovanni feel immensely sad, and he once again gazed up at the sky.

But no matter how hard he looked at the sky, he just couldn't see the cold barren place that the teacher had described in class. On the contrary, the more deeply he stared into it, the more he saw a field with little groves of trees and pastures. Then he noticed the blue stars of Lyra, the Harp, multiplying, twinkling all the while, and the Harp itself stretching out its legs then pulling them in until it looked like a long flat mushroom. As for the town just below, it took on the appearance of a blurry cluster of countless stars or a single, enormous puff of smoke....

MILKY WAY STATION

Then Giovanni saw the weather station pillar right behind him take on the vague shape of a triangular sign, flickering on and off like a firefly. When the blur in his eyes cleared, everything became clear and finely outlined, and the sign with its light soared straight up into the dense cobalt-blue field of the sky as if it were a sheet of freshly tempered steel. Out of the blue he was sure he heard a strange voice calling...

'Milky Way Station! Milky Way Station!'

And before his eyes there was a flash flood of intensely bright light, as if billions and billions of phosphorescent cuttle fish had fossilised at their most radiant instant and been plunged into the sky, or as if someone h ad discovered a hidden cache of precious jewels that the Diamond Company had been hoarding to bolt the price skyhigh, turning the whole treasure topsy-turvy and lavishing them throughout the heavens. Giovanni found himself rubbing his eyes over and over, blinded by the sudden dazzle.

By the time he came to, he had, for sometime now, been chugging along on the little train. It was really him on the nighttime narrow-gauge railroad, gazing out the window of a wagon with its little row of yellow lights. Inside, the seats, nearly all empty, were covered in green velvet, and two big brass buttons gleamed on the varnished

gray wall opposite him.

Giovanni noticed a tall boy in a jet-black wet coat poking his head out the window in the seat directly in front of him. He could have sworn, judging from the boy's shoulders, that he had seen him somewhere before. He wanted to know who it was so much that he couldn't stand it. But just as he was about to stick his own head out his window and take a look, the boy popped his in and turned toward him.

It was Campanella!

Giovanni was about to ask him if he had been on the train from the very beginning but Campanella spoke up sooner.

'Everybody ran so fast but they missed the train. Even Zanelli ran like mad but he couldn't catch up with me.'

Giovanni thought to himself...

I got it! We've got a pact to go away together.

But he said, 'Should we wait for them somewhere down the line?'

'Zanelli went home already,' said Campanella. 'His father came to get him.'

Campanella's face turned pale, and he looked as if something were hurting him. Giovanni felt funny inside, as though he couldn't remember something that he had somewhere forgotten.

'Oh, darnit,' said Campanella, coming alive and peering out the window again. 'I've forgotten my water bottle. And I've forgotten my sketchbook too. Well, no matter, we'll be coming into Swan Station soon. There's nothing I like better than watching swans. I'm sure I'll be able to see them no matter how far down the river they fly.'

Campanella looked down at the round plate-like map in his hand, busily turning it round and round. On the map a single track of rail skirted the left bank of the whitened Milky Way, tracing its way south and further south a gain. But the really fantastic thing was that the map, a platter black as night itself, was inlaid with little whistlestops and triangular signs one after the other, and forests and miniature lakes, all shining beautifully in blue, green and bitter-orange.

Giovanni was convinced that he had seen that map somewhere before.

'Where did you buy that map?' he asked. 'It's made of obsidian, isn't

it?'

'I got it at Milky Way Station. You mean, you didn't get one too?'

'Gee, I'm not sure if I went through Milky Way Station. We're around here now, aren't we?'

Giovanni pointed to a place directly north of a sign that read *Swan Station*.

'Right. Oh, good heavens! I wonder if that dry river bed is moonlight.'

When the two of them looked they saw the pale bank of the Milky Way glisten with pampas grass growing all along it, rustling and swishing, rolling in the wind into billows of waves in a silver sky.

'That's not moonlight,' said Giovanni. 'It's shining because it's the Milky Way!'

Giovanni, feeling so elated that he wanted to jump up and down, tapped his feet, poked his head out the window and whistled the tune of the rotating stars as if his life depended on it.

He couldn't get a clear picture of the water in the river no matter how hard he looked at it. He kept staring and staring until he gradually saw that the clear water was even more crystal than glass, even more transparent than hydrogen...and maybe it was just his eyes, but the water in spots seemed to be making delicate purple ripples or glistening rainbows of light as it flowed steadily, silently along. Phosphorescent triangular signs, beautifully erect, patched the sky. The faraway objects were small, the closer ones large; the faraway ones distinctly yellow, bitter-orange, the closer ones pale and faintly hazy. Some objects were triangular, others rectangular; some the shape of chains, others the shape of lightning...but they were all in place, filling the field with light.

Giovanni felt his heart throbbing down to his toes, and he shook his head for all he was worth. Then, as far and as wide as his eyes could see, the blues and oranges and all the luminescent sights began to tremble and flicker, as if they were alive and breathing themselves....

'I've made it right into the sky's field!' cried Giovanni. He leaned out the window and pointed to the front of the train with his left hand, adding, 'Besides, this train isn't burning coal at all.'

'Must run on alcohol or electricity,' said Campanella.

The beautiful little train, chugging and clanking its way through the pampas grass that waved in the sky and through the waters of the

Milky Way and the glimmering milky-white lights of triangles and deltas, was running on its endless journey.

'Oh, gentians are blooming. It's autumn for sure,' said Campanella, pointing out the window. Magnificent purplish gentians, so fine that they might have been carved out of moonstone, grew among the closely cropped grass that lined the track.

'Just you watch me hop right out of here, get some of those flowers and jump back on again,' said Giovanni, his heart leaping with excitement.

'Too late,' said Campanella. 'We've left them behind now.'

But no sooner had the words left his lips than had another batch of gentians flashed brightly past them...and then another, and another...cups with yellow at their hearts, gushing, passing in front of their eyes like rain...and a row of triangular signs, some smoky, others burning, rose up, radiant for all the world to see.

THE NORTHERN CROSS AND THE PLIOCENE COAST

'I wonder if my mum will ever forgive me,' said Campanella suddenly, stammering and flurried, but nonetheless resolute.

Giovanni was lost in his thoughts...

Sure, that's it! My mum is far down there by the orange-coloured sign that looks like a speck of dust. She's thinking about me this instant.

'I'd go to the ends of the earth to make my mum happy,' said Campanella, doing his best to hold back the tears. 'But I just can't figure out what would make her happiest.'

'At least there's nothing at all wrong with your mum,' exclaimed Giovanni, somewhat surprised himself.'

'Oh, I dunno. It's just that, I mean, a person creates happiness around him when he does something good. That's why I'm sure my mum will forgive me.'

Campanella looked like he had really made up his mind about

something.

All at once the inside of the wagon was flooded with a bright white light. Outside, where the water was flowing without sound or shape over the bed of the gleaming river, where diamonds and dew on the grass were interchangable, there was an island surrounded by an aura of pale light. Atop the island, on a plateau, stood a cross, silent and eternal, so dazzling and white that it might have been cast from frozen Arctic clouds, crowned with a pure halo of gold.

'Hallelujah! Hallelujah!'

Voices came from the front and back. The two boys looked around to see passengers in the wagon, the folds of their robes hanging down perfectly straight, some clutching black bibles to their chests, others with crystal rosaries about their necks clasping their hands in prayer...all facing the cross outside.

Both boys found themselves rising to their feet. Campanella's cheeks glistened with the colour of a ripe apple.

With time the island and the cross moved gradually back down the line.

The far bank of the Milky Way glimmered through the mist, the

pampas grass fluttered as if someone were breathing on it, the silver air was momentarily opaque with smoke, and the countless gentians vanished in the grass the n appeared again like soft will-o'-the-wisps.

But it wasn't long before clusters of pampas grass twice eclipsed the space between the river and the train and Swan Island appeared far back in the distance, like a little picture. The pampas grass rustled and swished once again, and the island disappeared entirely from view.

Behind Giovanni stood a tall Catholic-looking nun whom he had not seen come on the train. She wore a black habit, and her perfectly round green eyes stared downward as she appeared to be listening humbly to a voice or words coming from the outside. The passengers quietly returned to their seats, while the two boys discussed, in language somehow different from before, the new sensation of loneliness that had overtaken them.

'We'll be at Swan Station any minute now.'

'Yeah, we'll pull in at eleven o'clock on the button.'

Before long green and orange signals and milky-white posts were flashing by the window, the light of a dark indistinct automatic switch, shining like a sulphurous flame, passed on back, the train gradually eased its pace, and a row of electric lights, perfectly

spaced, appeared on a platform. The space between the lights became larger and larger, and the two boys came to a stop directly in front of the big clock at Swan Station.

Two hands of blue tempered steel pointed precisely to eleven on the crisp clear autumn face of the clock. All the other passengers alighted together, leaving the wagon deserted.

A sign below the clock read...

TWENTY MINUTE STOPOVER

'Should we get off here too?' asked Giovanni.

'Let's go!'

The two sprang up at once, flew out the door and made a mad dash for the ticket gate. But all they found at the gate was a bright purple electric light. There wasn't a soul around, not even a stationmaster or someone who looked like a redcap.

The boys came out onto a small square enclosed by gingko trees that looked hand-carved of quartz. A wide road led from the square straight off into the bluish light of the Milky Way.

The people from the train had gone somewhere and vanished. Giovanni and Campanella started up the white road, shoulder to shoulder, casting shadows in all directions like two pillars in a room with windows on all sides or like the spokes of two wheels. Before they knew it they had reached the beautiful river bed that they had seen from the train.

Campanella put a handful of sand into his palm and grated it with his fingers. He spoke as if in a dream...

'This sand is all made up of crystals. There's a tiny fire burning inside each and every grain.'

'That's right!' exclaimed Giovanni, fairly sure that he had learned that somewhere.

All of the pebbles on the bed were transparent, no doubt made up of quartz or topaz, some of them flawed and folded in on themselves, others of corundum giving off a pale misty light from their facets. Giovanni ran straight for the water's edge and dipped his hand into the liquid. The mysterious water of the Milky Way was even clearer than hydrogen and the boys were convinced that it was flowing, because when their wrists were submerged in it they appeared to be floating as if in mercury, and the phosphorescent waves frothed and sparkled as they splashed against their skin.

Upstream, below a cliff that was blanketed in pampas grass, they caught sight of a stretch of white rock as flat as a sports ground, jutting out to the line of the river. A number of people nearby seemed to be excavating or burying something as they stood up and stooped down with some sort of tool glinting from time to time in their hands.

'Let's go take a look,' said the two boys nearly in unison as they ran for the cliff.

A shiny smooth ceramic nameplate stood at the entrance to the area of white rock...

THE PLIOCENE COAST

Slim iron handrails had been planted in spots on the opposite bank, with lovely wooden benches sitting in the sand.

'Hey, I found something weird,' said Campanella puzzled, stopping to pick up what looked like a long narrow black walnut with a pointy end.

'It's a walnut! Look, they're all over the place, probably carried along by the river. They're in the rock too!'

'They're big for walnuts. This one's twice as big as normal. And this one's in perfect shape.'

'Let's go over where the people are right now. I bet they're digging up something or other.'

The two boys went ahead carrying their jaggedy black walnuts. To their left the ripples glowed softly against the water's edge like graceful lightning, while to their right the stalks of pampas grass, as if fashioned of silver or mother-of-pearl, covered the cliff face, swaying and rolling.

Once close enough to get a good look, they saw a tall scholarly man in boots and terribly thick glasses writing busily in a notebook. He was quite beside himself giving instructions to three assistants who were swinging pickaxes or shovelling with scoops.

'Don't break up that protuberance, use a scoop, a scoop! Watch out, dig around it first. No, not that way! No, no, be gentle with it, will ya?'

A massive white-boned beast protruded from the soft white rock. A good half of it had already been excavated. It was on its side, broken into fragments. The rock itself had been carefully carved out into some ten numbered squares which bore two cloven hoof prints.

'You fellows here to inspect?' asked the scholarly man, twinkling his glasses at Giovanni and Campanella. 'You saw all those walnuts, didn't you? They'd be somewhere in the neighbourhood of, oh, 1,200,000 years old, I'd say . Not very old, when you come down to it. This place here was a coastline some 1,200,000 years back, during the later Tertiary Period. Plenty of shells under here too. Saltwater ebbed and flowed here where the river is now. Now, take this beast here. We geologists call it a "boss"...hey, you, put down that pick! Can't you be more careful and use a chisel? This boss was the ancestor of today's cow. This place, I'd say, would've been literally crawling with them.'

'Are you going to display him in a museum?'

'No, we need him as evidence. You see, we know this place is a magnificent thick stratum, and we've got all the proof we need that it was formed 1,200,000 years ago. But some others don't see it in that light, claiming that it might be just wind, water or empty sky. Follow? However...hey, you, don't use your shovel on that! There's bound to be a set of ribs buried under there.'

The professor scurried over to the dig.

'It's time,' said Campanella, checking his wristwatch with the map. 'Let's go.'

'Well, I am afraid that we must take our leave,' said Giovanni, bowing formally to the professor.

'Must you? Well, goodbye.'

And having said this, he started running helter-skelter about, supervising things right and left.

As for the boys, they ran for their lives back over the white rock so as not to miss the train. They found themselves running just like the wind without skipping a single breath or getting hot sore knees.

If we can run like this, we can run anywhere in the whole wide world!

That's what Giovanni thought as they passed the river bed...the light on the ticket gate grew gradually larger and larger...and, in a flash, they were back in their old seats looking out the window at the very place they had been not a moment ago.

THE BIRDCATCHER

'Mind if I sit down here?'

Giovanni and Campanella heard a kindly, gravelly adult's voice behind them. The voice had come from a man with a stoop and a red beard, dressed in a shaggy brown overcoat and carrying his things in a huge bundle that was wrapped in white cloth and slung in two equal halves over his shoulders.

'Fine with us,' said Giovanni in reply, shrugging.

The man smiled faintly through his beard and lifted his bundle carefully onto the baggage rack above.

Giovanni was feeling immensely sad and lonely as he stared in silence at the clock in front of him. Far up ahead what sounded like a glass flute rang out and the train moved smoothly forward.

Campanella was examining the ceiling. A black beetle had come to rest on one of the lights, casting a monstrous shadow. The man with the red beard was staring intently at the two boys as if something in them were taking him back to somewhere or some time else. The train gradually began to pick up speed, and the pampas grass and river alternated in lighting up the air outside.

'May I enquire as to where you boys would be heading?' asked the man timidly.

'Further than anybody,' answered Giovanni sheepishly.

'That's really something. That's precisely where this train is going.'

'So where are you going?' asked Campanella suddenly and in a quarreling tone that made Giovanni smile.

Then a man across the aisle, sporting a pointy cap and dangling a large key from his waist, stole a look at them and smiled too, making Campanella blush and smile himself. But the man with the red beard didn't look angry in the least, and his cheeks twitched as he said...

'I'm gettin' off a bit down the track. Birdcatchin's my line.'

'What birds do you catch?'

'Why, cranes an' wild geese. An' herons an' swans, too.'

'Are there lots of cranes here?'

'Masses. They were just yelpin' back there, didn't ya hear 'em?'

'No.'

'If ya listen you can still hear 'em now. Prick up your ears and listen.'

Giovanni and Campanella raised their eyes and listened carefully. Amid the soft echo of the chugging of the train and the swishing of the pampas grass they heard the bubbly frothing and gurgling of water.

'How do you catch a crane?'

'Do you mean cranes or herons?'

'Uh, herons,' said Giovanni, not really caring which.

'Easy as pie! Herons are made of congealed sand from the Milky Way's bed, an' they keep comin' back to the river in a constant stream. If you wait on the bank all of them come soarin' down with their feet out like this, an' I pluck 'em off like sittin' ducks just before they reach the ground. Then they curdle up and pass on serenely to, well, greener pastures. Everybody knows what happens next. You press 'em.'

'Press 'em? You mean like flowers or specimens?'

'They're not specimens, no. I mean, everybody eats 'em. You boys know that much, don't you?'

'Sounds funny to me,' said Campanella, cocking his head.

'It ain't funny an' it ain't dubious in the least. Watch.' The man stood up and brought his bundle down from the rack, untying it with a nimble twirl of his fingers.

'Feast your eyes! A fresh batch.'

'They really are herons!' blurted out the boys.

There were some ten of them, somewhat ironed out, their black legs crumpled in under them, lying in a row side-by-side as if carved in relief, their pure white bodies radiating the very light of the Northern Cross that they had passed.

'They've all got their eyes closed,' said Campanella, gently touching a bird's white eyelid that was the shape of a crescent moon. They even had their white crests sticking out like spears.

'See what I mean?' said the birdcatcher, wrapping up his catch again, folding the cloth and securing it with twine.

Who on earth around here would eat a heron?

This is what Giovanni thought as he asked, 'Do herons taste good?'

'Good as goose! I've got orders flyin' in faster than I can fill 'em. But the wild geese, I should say, are in greater demand. Geese have much more breeding, an' what's more, they cause no trouble in the handling. Here.'

The birdcatcher untied the other bundle. Inside it was a row of yellow, off-white and speckled geese with their beaks lined up neatly and their bodies slightly flattened out, just like the herons.

'These geese may be gobbled anytime. How about it? Dig in.'

The birdcatcher gently pulled the yellow leg of a goose. It came off in a nice clean piece, as if it were made of chocolate.

'Eh, how about it? Have a piece on me,' he said, breaking the leg in two and giving them a half each.

Giovanni took a little bite and thought to himself...

Hold on, this is cake! It even tastes better than chocolate. This man is pulling our leg when he says that these geese can fly. He's just a cake salesman out in the field somewhere. But I do feel sorry for him, taking his cake and eating it too.

But even so, he didn't stop munching away on it.

'Have a bite more,' said the birdcatcher, reaching again for his bundle.

'Thank you just the same,' declined Giovanni, who really did want to have another piece.

So the birdcatcher offered it to the man with the large key in the seat across the aisle from him.

'Much obliged, but I shouldn't really be dippin' into your stock,' said the man, tipping his cap.

'Don't mention it,' said the birdcatcher, adding, 'Well, how're things goin' in the world of migratory birds?'

'Great, we're runnin' at full capacity. Just day before yesterday, during

the second shift, calls kept comin' in askin' me why the light in the lighthouse was on the blink, blinkin' at irregular intervals, you know, so I says to 'em, heaven only knows, it's not my doin', but it's the birds migratin' in big packed flocks passin' in front of the light, so what can you do? Ain't no good come complainin' to me, I tell 'em, take your complaint, I says, to the big fella with the long narrow beak an' the spindly legs, the one wearin' the cape that flutters in the wind! I gave it to 'em, I did! Ha!'

The pampas grass was gone now leaving the field outside shining with a new radiance.

'What makes the herons so hard to handle?' Campanella had been meaning to ask this from before.

'Look,' said the birdcatcher, turning back to the boys, 'you see, if you want to eat a heron, you've gotta first hang him up for a good ten days in the liquid light of the Milky Way, or you can bury 'em in the sand for a few days. It evaporates the mercury and then you can eat 'em.'

'This is no bird, it's really cake, isn't it!'

Both Giovanni and Campanella had been thinking this, but it was Campanella who had taken the plunge.

'That's right, this is where I get off,' said the birdcatcher, looking frightfully rushed. He then stood up, grabbed his big cloth bag and was soon nowhere to be seen.

The boys looked at each other, their eyes saying, 'Where did he go?' But the lighthouse keeper was all grin, leaning in front of the boys to peer out their window.

Out there they all saw the very same birdcatcher who had been with them a moment before. He was standing on a riverbank surrounded by chickweed that was giving off a lovely yellow and eggshell-white phosphorescence. He was staring up at the sky with a determined look, his two arms stretched out like wings.

'There he is! It's so weird. I bet he's got his eye on the birds right now. If only they would fly down before the train goes by!'

No sooner had those words left Giovanni's mouth than did a veritable snowfall of herons, squawking and calling, come fluttering down from the barren dark violet sky. At that, the birdcatcher, chuckling with glee that things were really coming his way now, spread out his legs on a 60 degrees angle, taking in the birds by their black legs hand over fist, pinning them down in his cloth bag. Once inside the bag the birds flickered blue, on and off like fireflies, until, in the end, they turned a hazy white colour and shut their eyes.

Most of the birds, however, were not caught. They came to a safe landing on top of the sand by the river, and as their feet touched the sand their bodies curled in, flattening like melted snow, spreading along the surface like molten copper fresh from a blast furnace, their forms clinging momentarily to the sand, turning light and dark, light and dark, until finally blending in without a trace.

The birdcatcher, now with some twenty birds in his bag, suddenly lifted both arms skyward, like a soldier who had been hit by a bullet and was on his last legs...when, in a flash, there was no sign of him outside and Giovanni heard a familiar voice coming from the seat next to him...

'Ah, I feel like a new man. Yep, nothin' like a hard day's work, best way to earn a crust!'

It was the birdcatcher himself, making rows of the herons which he had just caught and stacking them in a neat pile.

'How did you get back here in such a flash?' asked Giovanni, feeling both that he had expected the man to do it and yet that it was something quite miraculous as well.

'How? 'Cause I wanted to, that's how. Now, where on earth was it you two boys said you hailed from?'

Giovanni was about to answer when he realised that he couldn't for the life of him recall where in the world he came from. Campanella, too, had turned bright red trying to remember.

'Well, from a long, long way off, anyway,' said the birdcatcher, readily nodding, as if he knew all about it.

GIOVANNI'S TICKET

'We are about to leave Swan Zone. See for yourself. There's the renown Albireo Observatory.'

Outside the window four big black buildings stood in the very middle of the Milky Way, which itself was a galaxy of fireworks. Two enormous spheres, of translucent blue sapphire and dazzling yellow topaz invisibly looped together, were revolving around each other on the flat roof of one of the buildings. When the yellow one made its way around back, the smaller blue one circled forward until their edges overlapped, forming a single convex lens of rare green. Then gradually the centre would bulge and the blue sapphire would appear exactly in front, a green sphere with a yellow topaz ring around it. Again, slowly, the sapphire would move across to the other edge, reversing the shape of the lens before, and the two would part company as the topaz came forward. The black observatories lay there silently, as if at rest, encircled in the formless soundless liquid of the Milky Way.

'That's an instrument for measuring the speed of the water as it flows. You see, the water....'

That was all the birdcatcher could say before, without warning, a tall conductor in a red cap came up to their seats and spoke...

'Please have your tickets ready.'

The birdcatcher pulled a small slip of paper from his inside pocket without saying a word. The conductor glanced at it, immediately turning to Giovanni and Campanella, wagging his finger and pointing to them, as if to say, 'And where are *your* tickets?'

'Oh, gee,' said Giovanni, fidgeting at a loss for what to do. But Campanella produced a small gray ticket from out of nowhere, as if by second nature. Giovanni, now in a real flurry, reached deeply into his coat pocket to see if there was a ticket there, finding a big folded piece of paper. He quickly brought out his hand, surprised himself that there was something in it, and held up a green piece of paper, folded in quarters, about the size of a postcard. He thought...

I don't know what this paper is, but the conductor has his hand out, so why not give it to him!

The conductor took the piece of paper from him, stood at attention and carefully unfolded it. He fiddled with the buttons on his jacket as he read it, while the lighthouse keeper did his best to steal a peek at it from below. Giovanni, quite excited, was sure that the paper was some kind of certificate.

'Have you carried this from the Third Spatial Region?' asked the conductor.

'Search me,' said Giovanni, chuckling and looking up, now feeling considerably relieved and safe.

'Very well. We will be arriving at the Southern Cross in the neighbourhood of the next Third Hour,' said the conductor, returning Giovanni's ticket and going on down the aisle.

Campanella was dying to find out what was written on Giovanni's ticket, so he quickly took a peek at it. Giovanni couldn't wait to see either. But all they could make out on it were designs of black arabesques with ten or so funny-looking printed letters among them. They felt that if they continued to stare at the piece of paper they would certainly be swallowed up into it.

'Good heavens,' said the birdcatcher, taking a glimpse from the side. 'That ticket is really tops. It will take you higher than the sky! Even higher. With this ticket you've got safe conduct to anywhere your heart desires to go. With this ticket you can go wherever you wish on the imperfect Four-Dimensional-Milky-Way-Dream Train. You boys are really something!'

'Oh, I dunno,' said Giovanni, blushing, folding up his ticket and putting it back in his pocket.

He felt rather awkward as he stared out the window with

Campanella, vaguely aware that the birdcatcher was throwing them glances from time to time, as if to say, 'You boys are really tops!'

'We'll be pulling into Eagle Station any moment,' said Campanella, comparing his map with three little off-white triangular signs on the opposite bank.

Giovanni, without knowing why, felt very sorry for the birdcatcher, and when he thought about him being so overjoyed at becoming a new man when he caught his herons, wrapping them up in his white cloth bundle or just stealing glances at people's tickets and praising them to the high heavens, he wanted to give him everything he owned, his food and everything, though he really didn't know him very well at all. If it would make the birdcatcher happy, he would even stand for a hundred years at a time in the shining field of the Milky Way and catch his birds for him.

Giovanni couldn't remain silent any longer. 'What is it you wish for more than anything else?' is what he wanted to ask him. But that would be altogether too abrupt. As he considered what else he might ask and turned toward the birdcatcher...

...The birdcatcher wasn't there at all! And his huge white bundle was gone from the overhead rack as well.

Giovanni immediately looked outside, sure that he would be out

there, his legs planted solidly, searching the skies for a heron to catch. But his broad back and tapered hat were nowhere to be seen. All that was there was a waving white sea of pampas grass and a beautiful blanket of sand.

'Where'd he go off to?' asked Campanella in a daze.

'That's a good question. I wonder where on earth we'll ever meet up with him again. I just wanted to say a few more words to him.'

'Oh, me too.'

'I really feel awful, because at first I thought he was going to get in our way.' Giovanni had never felt odd in quite that way and certainly had never been able to express it.

'Hold on, I smell apples!' said Campanella, looking around in amazement.

'Could it be because I was just thinking about apples?'

'I smell apples too. And wild roses!'

Giovanni looked all around, but the smell seemed to be coming from

outside the window. This puzzled him all the more because it was autumn and not at all the season for wild roses.

Before they knew it a boy about six years old, with glossy hair, wearing an unbuttoned red blazer, was standing nearby. He had a terrible expression of fear on his face, shivering and quaking in bare feet. A young man in a properly fitted black suit, as tall and straight as a zelkova tree blasted for an age by the wind, stood beside the little boy, holding him firmly by the hand.

'Oh God, where are we? Oh, it's so lovely here,' said Kaoru, a little girl of about twelve with pretty brown eyes, wearing a black overcoat and clinging to the young man's arm as she stared outside in wonder.

'Why, it's Lancashire. No, it's the State of Connecticut. No, oh...we've come to the sky! We're on our way to Heaven,' said the young man in black, radiating good cheer to the little girl. 'See for yourself. That is the sign for Heaven. There's nothing to be afraid of now. We are being summoned by God.'

But then, for some reason, deep furrows appeared on his brow and he looked weary. He tried to force a smile as he sat the little boy down next to Giovanni and gently instructed the girl to sit beside Campanella. She sat down obediently, folding her hands together on her lap.

The little boy had an odd expression on his face. 'I'm going to see my sister, Kikuyo,' he told the young man, who had just seated himself opposite the lighthouse keeper.

The young man, unable to say a word, stared with the saddest eyes at the little boy's wavy soaking-wet hair. Suddenly the little girl put her hands to her face and sobbed.

'Your father and your sister, Kikuyo, still have lots of work to do,' said the young man. 'But they'll be along someday soon. More than that, just think of how long your mother has been waiting for you. She's waiting and worrying and imagining the songs that her sweet little boy, Tadashi, would be singing. She would be picturing you holding hands with the other children and skipping round and round the garden bushes when snow falls in the morning. So let's go right now and see mummy!'

'Okay, but I still would rather have not got on that ship in the first place.'

'I know, but look up...see? That fantastic river, see it? The milky-white place in the sky that you used to see from your window all summer long and sing, *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star*...it's right there! See how lovely it is, shining so brightly?'

The little girl, who had been crying, wiped her eyes with a

handkerchief and looked outside.

'We have nothing to be sad about anymore,' explained the young man calmly to them. 'We're travelling through this fine place and soon we will be in God's house, where it will be as bright as bright can be, the smells are sweet and the people are truly grand. All of the people who went in the lifeboats in our place will surely be saved and will go back to their own mothers and fathers who are so worried about them or to their own homes and children. Now, we'll be there soon, so cheer up and sing out with everything you've got.'

The young man consoled them, stroking the little boy's wet black hair. Gradually his own expression brightened too.

'Where did you people come from?' asked the lighthouse keeper, finally beginning to understand a little. 'What brought you here?'

The young man gave a faraway smile.

'Well, the ship hit an iceberg and sank,' he said. 'Their father was called home unexpectedly two months ago, so we waited and set off later. I was a university student hired as their private tutor. But then, exactly twelve days out...today, or maybe, yesterday...the ship hit an iceberg, listed just like that, then began to sink. There was some hazy moonlight that night but the fog was extremely thick. Half of the lifeboats on the port side had gone under and there weren't

enough left to carry everyone.

'I realised that in a moment the whole ship would be lost, so I cried out with all my might for somebody to help save these children. The people nearby made a path for them and started to pray, but there were still many little children and their parents standing between us and the lifeboats, and I didn't have the heart to push them aside. I still felt though that it was my duty to save these little ones, so I tried to elbow my way past the children in front.

'Then it dawned on me that, better than saving them in that way, I should bring them just as they are now before God. The next moment though I saw that I alone would be sinning before God if I did not try to save them. But there was no way for me to do it. It tore me up inside to see mothers going crazy throwing kisses to their children in the lifeboats and fathers standing stiffly on deck holding back their tears.

'I knew that the ship was going down fast, so, resigned to fate, I embraced these two little ones, determined to stay afloat for as long as possible. Someone threw a lifebuoy at us but it slipped and flew out of reach. I frantically ripped some grating from the deck and we clung onto it. Suddenly, as if from nowhere, someone was singing a hymn, and soon everyone joined in in many different languages.

'Then we heard a loud boom and we were plunged into the water. I

held on tightly to these two, but we must have been caught in a whirlpool because everything vanished and the next thing we knew we found ourselves here.

Their mother passed away two years ago now. Oh yes, the lifeboats must have been safely away from the ship when it sank, I mean, what else would you expect with all those seasoned sailors rowing them?'

Faint prayers could be heard, and Giovanni and Campanella, their eyes smarting, recalled things which they had forgotten up till then.

Oh, that big ocean must have been the Pacific. And someone is working his life away in a far northern corner of that ocean where the icebergs float, battling the wind and the frozen tide and the violent cold in a little boa t. I really feel sorry for that man, really sorry! What can I do to make him happy?

That is what Giovanni thought, his head bowed in grief.

'Who knows what happiness is?' said the lighthouse keeper, comforting him. 'So long as you're on the proper road, no matter how trying a thing may be, you'll be getting closer, one step at a time, up and down the mountain to real happiness.'

'Yes, that's true,' said the young man in a reverential tone. 'To attain

the truest happiness you must first know all kinds of sorrow, for such is God's will.'

The little brother and sister, Tadashi and Kaoru, were already sunk deep down into their seats, fast asleep. They now had soft white shoes on their feet where there had been nothing before.

The little train chugged and clanked, making its way along the phosphorescent bank of the river, with fields appearing through the windows on the other side as if straight out of a magic lantern. Hundreds and thousands of triangular signs of every size stretched to the very edge of the fields, the larger ones topped with red-dotted surveyors' flags so thick and dense that on the horizon they appeared like a pale mist, and from there and from further afield than anyone could see, signal fires and flares of all kinds shot up one after the other into the dark violet sky. The breeze, clear and lovely, was filled with the scent of roses.

'Want one? I bet you've never had apples like these before.'

The lighthouse keeper across the aisle was carefully holding large beautiful golden and red apples in his lap.

'Wow, where'd those come from?' said the young man, genuinely impressed and taken aback.

'They're incredible! I didn't know they had apples like those around here.' He tilted his head, fixing his squinted eyes on the bunch of apples in the man's lap.

'Well, anyway, help yourself. Come on, don't be shy.'

The young man glanced at Giovanni and Campanella, taking an apple for himself.

'And you little tykes there. Come on, come an' get 'em.'

Giovanni didn't much fancy being called a 'little tyke,' so he just sat tight in silence. But Campanella thanked the lighthouse keeper. At this the young man took two apples and handed them to the boys. Giovanni rose to his feet and thanked the man too.

The lighthouse keeper, who could now manage to carry the rest of the apples by himself, went to the little brother and sister and gently placed one apple each in their laps.

'Thank you very much,' said the young man looking on. 'Where do they grow apples as lovely as these?'

'Of course this region is farmland, but generally speaking things just grow by themselves. Farming shouldn't break anybody's back. All

you do here is sow the seed of your choice and, day by day, the plant grows of its own accord. And the rice here isn't like your rice around the Pacific Ocean, because it's got no husks, and besides, the grains are ten times bigger and they smell absolutely delicious.

'They don't farm up where you're headin', though, but you can eat the apples and cakes there down to the very last morsel, and you'll find yourself giving off a faint sweet aroma through your own pores, a different aroma for each person!'

Suddenly Tadashi blinked his eyes open.

'Oh, I was just dreaming of my mother,' he said. 'She was standing by this great big cupboard or bookshelf or something and she was holding out her hand and looking at me and smiling so big. I said, "Mummy, do you want me to get an apple for you?" And that's when I just woke up. Gee, this is the same train I was on before.'

'You've got the apple,' said the young man. 'This nice man gave us all one.'

'Thank you, Sir. Hey, Kaoru's still asleep. I'll wake her up, okay? Sis? Look, we got apples. Wake up and see!'

Kaoru smiled and opened her eyes, rubbing them with both hands

from the glare. Then she saw the apples.

Tadashi was munching away at an apple as if it were a piece of pie. The peel that he had taken the trouble to peel off took on the shape of a corkscrew as it fell, turned smoky gray, flared and evaporated before reaching the floor.

Giovanni and Campanella stashed their apples in their pockets for safe keeping.

Downstream there was a vast forest growing on the far bank of the river, its thick and deep green branches loaded down with round ripe fruit, glowing red, a bewilderingly tall triangular sign standing in its very centre. The breeze from the forest carried the indescribably beautiful sound of bells and xylophone that mingled with everything, permeating the air.

The young man shuddered, spellbound by the sound.

They all listened to the music in silence as the sky unfolded into what looked like a yellow and light-green meadow...or carpet...and pure white dewdrops, like wax, swept across the face of a sun.

'Oh, look at those crows!' cried Kaoru, who was now beside Campanella.

'Those aren't crows, they're magpies,' exclaimed Campanella in what came out as a scolding voice, causing Giovanni to laugh unintentionally and the little girl to feel very selfconscious.

Black birds in their thousands had come to rest in rows along the milky-white bank, bathing motionlessly in the glow coming off the river.

'Yes, they are magpies,' interceded the young man. 'You can tell by the tuft sticking out from the back of their heads.'

By now the tall sign in the green forest was face to face with the train, and the familiar strains of the hymn's melody could be heard coming from the wagons in the very back. It sounded like it was being sung by a huge chorus of people. The young man turned pale and wan, started to rise and follow the sound, but decided to sit down again.

Kaoru buried her face in her handkerchief and even Giovanni couldn't help but get a bit sniffly. Somehow the melody was picked up by someone, until both Giovanni and Campanella found themselves singing along in unison.

The dense-green olive grove glistened in tears as it moved gradually beyond the invisible river, the mysterious music streaming out of it

growing faint, drowned out by the sounds of the train and the rush of the wind.

'Look, a peacock!' cried Tadashi.

'Peacocks, lots of them,' said Kaoru.

Giovanni was watching the reflection of light coming off the peacocks as they spread and closed their feathers above a grove now no bigger than a miniature green shell button.

'Right,' said Campanella to Kaoru. 'It was peacock calls we heard before.'

'Yes, I know,' she said. 'I saw about thirty of them. It was the peacocks that sounded like a harp.'

Giovanni, glum yet not knowing why, wanted to glare at Campanella and say, 'Hey, let's hop off here and have some fun!'

The river divided in two. A turret as high as the sky had been erected on the island at its fork, and on top of it perched a man in a red cap and loosely fitting clothes. He was looking toward the sky and signaling with red and green flags in his hands.

He waved the red flag repeatedly in the air then suddenly brought it down, hid it behind his back and lifted the green one as high as he could, waving it furiously, like an orchestra conductor. At that very moment an unbelievable clamour filled the air as if it had suddenly started raining cats and dogs, and whole clusters of little black birds shot, as if out of the mouth a shotgun, across the sky to the far side of the river. Giovanni found himself sticking half his body out the window to get a good look at the tens of thousands of little birds as they flew, each and every one calling through the magnificent dark violet sky.

'Just look at those birds fly,' he said from outside the window.

'Birds?' said Campanella, looking up.

The man in the loose outfit on top of the turret suddenly raised his red flag and waved it madly. At that moment the great cloud of birds froze, an earsplitting crash was heard downstream, and it was perfectly quiet. Yet no sooner was there quiet than did the red-capped signaller once again wave his green flag, yelling out in a voice as clear as a bell...

'Now is the time for all migratory birds to migrate! Now is the time for all migratory birds to migrate!'

And once again the great mass of countless birds shot overhead.

Kaoru poked her head out of the same middle window as the two boys, facing upwards with lovely sparkling cheeks.

'Oh, so many birds!' she said to Giovanni. 'And the sky is so pretty too!'

But Giovanni turned a deaf ear to Kaoru, keeping his mouth shut, considering her no more than a big pain in the neck and continuing to look up at the sky.

Kaoru took a faint breath, fell silent and returned to her seat. Campanella, feeling sorry for her, drew his head back inside and concentrated on his map.

'Is that man there to teach the birds?' she asked Campanella softly.

'He's there giving signals to migrating birds,' he replied, unsure of himself. 'I mean, a flare rockets up or something, telling him to do it.'

Silence filled the wagon. Giovanni wanted to bring his head in from the window, but the bright light inside would be too hard to bear, so he remained as he was and whistled a tune.

Why am I so forlorn? I should be a kinder person, a more generous person. I can see a small blue flame, hazy with smoke, way beyond.

It is so quiet and cold, but it calms my spirit if I keep my mind on it.

Giovanni, gazing in the distance, grasped his burning, throbbing head in both hands.

Is there really nobody who will stick with me to the edges of the universe and beyond? Campanella just sits there jabbering away to that little girl, and it hurts me more than anybody knows.

Giovanni's eyes filled with tears, making the Milky Way seem even more remote and dreamy white.

By this time the train had veered away from the river, passing above a cliff. The black cliff face by the waterline on the opposite bank loomed gradually higher and higher at the lower reaches of the river. A huge stand of corn flashed into view, with leaves that were all frizzled and curly and husks that were big and already a striking green, sprouting red hairs and boasting kernels like pearls.

Soon the number of plants had multiplied until the stand, with plants in rows, lined the area between the cliff and the track. When Giovanni pulled his head in and looked through the windows across the aisle he saw ears of corn swaying in the breeze, growing all the way to the horizon, laden with red and green dewdrops on the tips of their curly leaves, shining like diamonds that had absorbed the rays of the sun.

'That's corn, isn't it?' said Campanella to Giovanni.

But Giovanni wasn't in a mood to be cheered up and sat there gazing at the field with a moony face.

'Guess so,' he answered.

That's when the train slowed down, passed by a few signals and illuminated switches and came to a halt at a little station.

The milky-white clock face opposite them indicated precisely the Second Hour, the wind died down, the train was still and a pendulum ticktocked the time throughout the still quiet country.

Then a faint melody, perfectly in time with the ticking of the clock, came their way, a thread of sound from the far fringes of the field.

'It's the New World Symphony,' said Kaoru to herself.

All the people in the train, including the stately young man in black, were plunged into a tender dream of their own creation.

Why can't I cheer myself up in such a peaceful place as this? Why

am I so alone? And that Campanella, he's really being mean. We're on this train together and all he does is blabber to that little girl. It's really hard to take!

Giovanni, his face half-buried in his palms, stared out the far windows. A flutelike note, clear as glass, rang out and the train began to creep along as Campanella sadly whistled the tune of the rotating stars.

'Precisely, precisely, you see, it's all high prairie up here,' blurted out an old man from behind, as if he had just woken up. 'Now, if it's corn you want, you gotta open up a hole two feet deep and plant the seed in that, otherwise you haven't got a prayer.'

'Is that right? I guess we won't be reaching the river for quite some time yet.'

'Precisely, precisely. We're still a good two thousand to six thousand feet above her. We're over one hell of a gorge here.'

Giovanni was struck by a thought...

Sure, we're over the plateaus of Colorado!

Kaoru, far away in thought, her face like an apple wrapped in silk,

was staring in the same direction as Giovanni. Campanella was still whistling sadly to himself.

All of a sudden the corn was gone, leaving a vast black stretch of prairie from one horizon to the other.

The New World Symphony was coming in loud and clear from beyond the horizon when an American Indian, an arrow fixed in his taut bow, decked out in a white feather headdress and a variety of stones on his arms and breast, st arted running after the train as fast as his mocassins would take him.

'Gosh, it's an Indian!' cried Tadashi. 'Look, an Indian!'

This woke up the young man in black and sent both Giovanni and Campanella to their feet.

'He's running after us!' exclaimed Kaoru. 'He's running this way, chasing us!'

'No, he isn't chasing the train,' said the young man, standing up and putting his hands in his pockets as if unaware of where he was. 'He's hunting or dancing.'

What he was doing did look very much like a dance...his step was

too measured and methodical to be a sprint. Then, without warning, he stopped dead in his tracks, his white headdress tumbled down in front of him and he fired his arrow quick as a flash into the air. A crane whirled dizzily down and once again he dashed ahead to catch it in his open arms. He stopped there, beaming.

But his figure standing there holding the crane in his arms and looking in the direction of the train grew steadily smaller and ever distant, two ceramic insulators on a telegraph pole glittered by, and once again they were passing through thickets of corn. The train was moving along the top of a gigantic cliff, the wide river flowing, shining back far down below it.

'Precisely,' said the old man. 'From here on it's all downhill. Which is not to say that it's a breeze gettin' down to river level in one go. This train can never go the other way, 'cause the angle here is too much for her. See, we're pickin' up speed already.'

The train chugged faster and faster down the slope and, as it skirted the very edge of the cliff, the river shone brightly in their eyes. Giovanni's mood brightened too. They sped past a small hut with a solitary little boy standing in front of it. He cried out into the air.

The train was steeply clanking down the incline even faster now, all the people in it pushed back hard against their seats and holding on for dear life. Giovanni and Campanella smiled at each other. The

Milky Way was streaming furiously past them, virtually under their nose, giving off brilliant flashes of light. Wild pinks were in bloom along the pale red bank where the train slowed down by degrees, running steadily and smoothly again.

Banners decorated with stars and picks were flying on either bank of the river.

'I wonder what banners those are,' said Giovanni, finally managing to eke out some words.

'Beats me. Nothing like them on my map. There's an iron boat there too.'

'Yeah.'

'Perhaps they're building a bridge,' said Kaoru.

'Sure, they're Army Engineers' banners! They're on bridge-building manoeuvers. Except, I don't see any soldiers around.'

Just then, a little downstream by the opposite bank, the invisible river flashed, and a pillar of water shot up high into the air with an ear-splitting boom.

'They're blasting! They're blasting!' cried Campanella, jumping for joy.

The water in the pillar disappeared, but huge salmon and trout that had been flung into the sky by the explosion remained in the air, their bellies gleaming white as they described a perfect arc before falling back into the river.

Giovanni was in such high spirits now that he wanted to leap into the air himself.

'It's the Army Engineers of the Sky!' he said. 'Fantastic! Those trout or whatever just went rocketing up like this. I've never been on such a great trip as this. Out of this world!'

'Those trout would be this big close up,' said Campanella. 'The number of fish in this river is amazing.'

'I wonder if there are little fish too,' said Kaoru, now hooked on the boys' conversation.

'There's bound to be,' replied Giovanni, smiling at her and feeling his old self again. 'If they've got big ones, they'd be bound to have little ones too. We're just too far away to see them.'

'Look, those must be the palaces where the twins live,' exclaimed Tadashi, suddenly pointing out the window.

Two little shrines that might have been fashioned of crystal stood roof-to-roof on top of a rolling hill to their right.

'What's the palaces where the twins live?'

'Our mother told us about them lots of times,' explained Kaoru. 'There are two little crystal palaces next to each other just as she said there would be.'

'Tell us about them. What are twin stars doing in the sky?'

'Why don't you ask me?' said Tadashi. 'The twins went to the meadow to play. Then they had an argument with a crow, see?'

'No, that's not how it went,' said Kaoru. 'Let's see now. It was on the bank of the Milky Way, mummy said so, she....'

'And the comet came whooshing by. Whoosh! Whoosh!'

'Stop it, Tadashi! That's not the way it was. That's a different story altogether.'

'So it's them playing that flute?' asked Giovanni.

'They're off at sea,' said Tadashi.

'No they're not!' insisted Kaoru. 'They've already been to sea.'

'Yeah I know, I know,' continued Tadashi. 'I can tell you all about it.'

The opposite bank of the invisible river turned a sudden red and its waves glittered like needles, throwing what looked like willows into stark silhouette. A large crimson fire was burning in a distant field, its towering smoke threatening to scorch the deep violet of the sky. The flame was more transparent red than a ruby, more exquisite than lithium.

'I wonder what's causing that fire,' said Giovanni. 'What could be burning to give off a flame as red as that?'

'It's Scorpio's fire,' replied Campanella, his head buried in his map.

'Oh I know about Scorpio's fire,' said Kaoru.

'So what is it then?' asked Giovanni.

'Scorpio burnt to death. My father told me millions of times that the fire burns to this very day.'

'A scorpion's an insect, right?'

'Uh huh, it is. But it's a nice insect.'

'A scorpion's not a nice insect! I saw one in alcohol at the museum. He's got a huge stinger on his tail, and the teacher said if he stings you, you die!'

'I know, but he's still a nice insect. My father told me that a long long time ago Scorpio lived in Valdola Vale and he survived by killing teeny bugs and eating them up. Then one day he was caught by a weasel and it looked like he was going to be eaten all up himself. He tried to get away with all his might and he was about to be pinned down by the weasel when he saw this well and he fell right down into it, and there was no way in the world he could get back up, so it looked like he was going to drown for sure. So then he began to pray...

Oh, I can't remember how many living creatures I have killed in my lifetime, but now I found myself trapped by the weasel and running for my own life. Woe is me! Everything is so risky in life. Why didn't I just give my body to the weasel and be done with it? If I had, at

least he would have been able to live another day.

Dear God, please look into my heart and in the next life don't throw away my life in vain like this, but use my body for the good and happiness of all!

'That's what he said. And Scorpio saw his body turn bright red and burn into a beautiful flame, lighting up the darkness of the night sky! And he's burning now too, that's what my father said. That fire...it must be him.'

'Sure, look! The triangular signs are lined up exactly in the shape of a scorpion.'

Giovanni could clearly see beyond the tower of fire...three signs making up a scorpion's front legs with five others nearer to him forming the tail with a hook in its stinger. The red flame burned brightly without so much as a crackle.

As the fire receded gradually into the distance everyone began to hear all sorts of indescribably lively music, to smell what smelled like bouquets of flowers and to hear a mixed murmur of voices and whistling. There appeared to be a town nearby with some sort of festival in progress.

'Oh Centaurus, Let the Dew Fall!' cried Tadashi, who had been fast asleep until then in the seat beside Giovanni.

Outside the window stood a green Christmas tree, a fir or cypress, its branches swimming with countless miniature bulbs, as if thousands of fireflies were swarming throughout them.

'How could I forget? Tonight was the Centaur Festival!'

'Yeah, this must be Centaur Village,' piped in Campanella.

'I never miss a ball that's thrown to me,' boasted Tadashi inexplicably.

'Momentarily we will arrive at the Southern Cross,' said the young man to the children. 'Please prepare to alight.'

'I'm gonna stay on the train a little bit longer,' said Tadashi.

Kaoru stood up on shaky legs and made preparations to leave. She looked sad to have to say goodbye to Giovanni and Campanella.

'We must get off here,' said the young man to Tadashi, closing his lips firmly.

'I won't! I'm gonna stay on a little longer!'

'You can stay on with us,' said Giovanni, unable to hold himself in. 'We've got a ticket that goes on forever!'

'But we have to get off here,' said Kaoru, sadly. 'This is where you get off to go to Heaven.'

'Who says you have to go to Heaven? My teacher says that we have to create a place that's even better than Heaven right here.'

'But our mummy's already there, and besides, God says so.'

'A God who says that is a phony God.'

'Your God is the phony one!'

'He is not!'

'What kind of God is your God?' interrupted the young man, smiling.

'How should I know?' said Giovanni. 'But he's not like hers! He's the only real God.'

'Of course the real God is only one God,' said the young man.

'I don't mean it that way,' said Giovanni. 'I mean the really real God.'

'That's what I'm saying too. Let us pray that we will all meet someday in the course of time before that real God.'

The young man humbly clasped his hands together, Kaoru did the same, and all of them looked frightfully pale and very reluctant to say goodbye to each other. Giovanni could hardly contain his tears.

'Well now, are you ready? We're nearly at the Southern Cross.'

It was at that instant....far downstream, emerging like a single tree out of the invisible water of the river, a cross studded with lights of blue, bitter-orange and every colour under the sun and crowned with a pale white halo of cloud. There was a great hustle and bustle inside the train as all the passengers stood to attention and prayed, just as they had done at the Northern Cross, and cries of joy, like the ones you hear when children grab for a melon, were heard...and deep pious sighs.

Eventually the cross came into full view outside the windows with the white halo cloud, more white than the flesh of an apple,

revolving gently around and around it.

'Hallelujah! Hallelujah!'

Their voices rang out pleasantly in chorus as they heard the crystal-clear call of a bugle from the remotest part of that cold remote sky. The train rolled slowly through a long series of signals and electric lights, crawling to an eventual stop directly in front of the cross.

'Well, everyone off!'

The young man took Tadashi's hand and made his way toward the exit.

'Goodbye for now,' said Kaoru to the two boys, looking back at them.

'Goodbye,' said Giovanni in a brusque voice, only because he was trying to hold in his tears.

She looked back at them once more, her eyes wide open with suffering...then silently, left. The train was more than half-emtpy...then, before they knew it, there wasn't a soul left in it at all. A vacant wind blew through the wagons.

The boys looked outside. All of the people had come together, forming rows in humble prayer, kneeling on the Milky Way's sand in front of the cross. A godlike figure in white robe was crossing the invisible water, coming toward them with outstretched arms. But at that very moment the glass whistle blew, the train inched forward, and a silver mist came streaming up between them and the river. Nothing was visible there now save for a grove of walnut trees, their leaves gleaming, and a cute little electric squirrel with a golden halo who kept poking his face, blinking, through the mist.

When the mist finally began to lift they could see a wide road lined with electric lights skirting the track for some distance then leading off into the blue. The little pea-coloured lights blipped off as the train approached, as if acknowledging its presence, then blipped back on again as it passed.

The cross had shrunk so small in the distance that it looked like you could pick it right up and hang it on your chest, and there was no way on earth of knowing whether the little girl, the young man and the others were still kneeling on that white sand or had already gone off to their heaven.

'Campanella,' said Giovanni, sighing deeply, 'we're alone again. Let's stay together till the ends of the earth, okay? If I could be like that scorpion and do something for the benefit of all people, I wouldn't care if my body burnt up a hundred times over.'

'Me too,' said Campanella, his eyes welling with the clearest tears.

'But what is real happiness, Campanella?'

'Don't ask me,' he answered dreamily.

'We'll keep our spirits up, won't we?' said Giovanni, taking a deep breath and feeling a new strength gushing through him.

'Hey, there's the Coal Sack!' cried Campanella, pointing to a spot in the Milky Way and leaning back as he did so. 'It's a hole in the sky!'

Giovanni shivered in fright as he looked at the Coal Sack. It was a huge black gaping hole in the river, and the longer he stared and squinted into it, the more his eyes smarted and he couldn't tell how deep the bottom went or what was down below it.

'I'm not scared of all that dark,' he said. 'I'm going to get to the bottom of everything and find out what will make people happy. We'll go together, Campanella, as far as we can go.'

'Yes we will, Giovanni. Oh look over there,'cried Campanella, pointing to a distant field. 'That is the most beautiful country I have ever seen. Everybody's there. That's the real heaven. Look, my mother's there too. Look!'

Giovanni looked, but what he saw was all milky white and blurry, not at all like what Campanella was describing. He felt indescribably lonely as he peered out, catching sight only of two telegraph poles on the opposite bank , their red crossbeams linked, like arms.

'Campanella,' said Giovanni, turning toward him, 'we're going to stick together, okay?'

But there was no Campanella where Campanella had been sitting, only the black shining velvet seat.

Giovanni bolted up like a rocket, leaning far out the window so that he wouldn't be heard as he screamed into the sky, pounding his chest hard and crying out with a throatful of tears.

Everything seemed to go black all at once.

Giovanni opened his eyes. He had fallen asleep exhausted in the grass of the hill. He felt a strange burning sensation inside as cold tears streamed down his cheeks and he sprang to his feet.

The town below was bound together by countless lights, just as before, yet now they were somehow more radiant mellow. The Milky Way where he had just dreamt himself to was still a hazy blurry

white mass smoking above the black southern horizon with the red star in Scorpio twinkling beautifully to the right beside it. The stars in the sky did not appear to have changed position very much from before.

Giovanni sprinted down the hill. All he could think of was his mother who was waiting until he came home before having her dinner. He passed through the black grove of pine trees, turned by the faintly white pasture fence a nd came to the front entrance of the darkened cowshed. It looked like someone was in now, because he saw a cart with two barrels of something loaded on it.

'Hello, anybody here?' shouted Giovanni.

'Coming!'

A man in thick white pants emerged, adding, 'What can I do for you?'

'Well, we didn't get our milk delivered today.'

'Oh, I'm terribly sorry.'

The man immediately went in back and returned with a bottle of milk.

'Really sorry about this,' he said, handing the bottle to Giovanni and smiling. 'This afternoon I was pretty careless and left the gate to the calf pen open. The little devil made a beeline to his mother and drank up half her milk.'

'I see. Well, I'll take this home then.'

'Please do. Terribly sorry about this.'

'That's okay.'

Giovanni went out the pasture gate with both hands wrapped around the warm bottle of milk. He walked a distance through a heavily treed part of town, coming out onto the main road, and when he reached the crossroad, he could see to his right the turrets of the big bridge standing tall in the hazy sky over the river where Campanella and the others had gone to float lanterns.

Small groups of women who had gathered on the corners of the crossroad and in front of the shops were looking toward the bridge and speaking in hushed tones. The bridge itself was swimming in all kinds of light.

Giovanni, feeling a strange chill inside, shouted to the people close by...

'Is something wrong?'

'A child has fallen into the water,' said one of them, and they all turned at once toward him.

Giovanni ran for his life toward the bridge. The river was invisible for all of the people on the bridge. A policeman in white was among them.

Giovanni reached the end of the bridge and flew down to a wide section of river bed. Many lights were moving up and down along the water's edge, and a number of lantern flames could be seen roving the dark embankment on the opposite bank as well. Between them the river, with no lantern to illuminate it now, flowed in a single gray tranquil stream with little more than a murmur.

People were standing in a black mass at the farthest point downstream where the river formed a sandbar. Giovanni quickly made his way there, bumping into Marceau, who had been with Campanella earlier.

'Giovanni,' said Marceau, running toward him. 'Campanella's fallen into the river.'

'Why? When?'

'Zanelli was trying to push a lantern down the river from the boat, and that's when the boat tilted and kind of dumped him into the water. Campanella dove right in after him and he pushed Zanelli back to the boat, and Kato got a hold of him, but then nobody could see Campanella after that.'

'But everybody's looking, aren't they?'

'Yeah, they all came right away, Campanella's father too. But nobody can find him. They took Zanelli home.'

Giovanni went to where everyone was waiting. Campanella's father, his jaw angular and pale, wearing a black suit, was staring at the watch gripped in his right hand. He stood tall, encircled by students and townspeople.

Everyone's eyes were fixed on the river. Not a soul was saying a word. Giovanni's legs trembled and quaked. The ripples of the black water flashed and glistened as acetylene lamps came and went on the river, just like at fishing time.

Downstream, the Milky Way was reflected from one edge of the river to the other as if there were no water there at all but only sky.

Giovanni felt that by now Campanella could be nowhere but on the very farthest edge of that river of only sky.

But everyone still wanted to believe that from somewhere among those waves Campanella would appear and say...

Boy, did I ever swim!

...or that he would be standing on a sandbar that the people didn't even know existed, forced to wait for someone to find him.

All of a sudden Campanella's father spoke up emphatically.

'It's no use. It's been forty-five minutes since he fell in.'

Giovanni raced up and stood before him.

I know where Campanella went. I travelled with Campanella.

That's what he wanted to say...but the words just stuck somewhere in his throat.

Campanella's father, thinking that Giovanni had come to offer his

sympathy, peered for some time straight into his eyes and said politely...

'You would be Giovanni, isn't that right? Thank you for coming tonight, Son.'

Giovanni bowed, unable to speak.

'Has your father come back home yet?' He was still gripping the watch in his fist.

'No,' replied Giovanni with a slight shake of his head.

'I wonder what could have happened? Just two days ago I had a wonderful letter from him.

He should be home by about today. The boat must have been delayed, that's it. You'll come to our home tomorrow after school with every one else, won't you, Giovanni?'

With those words Campanella's father gazed far downstream where the galaxy was part of the river itself.

Giovanni had no words for the many feelings that filled his heart. He

left Campanella's father and went home to take the milk to his mother and tell her about his father's homecoming, running as fast as his legs would carry him along the river's bed toward town.

THE END